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THE CARCAVELOS COMMISSION AND THE NEW CONSTITUTIONS

The commission quickly opted for a text which would be inspirational, biblical in tone, and reflecting diversities of culture and experiences.

On the Spiritan charism, it was found that there were divergent orientations towards the poor, also a clash between liberation theology and traditional stances. The members refused to polarize poverty too much. The biblical "poor" was left as suggestive, leaving circumscriptions, cultures and individuals room for discernment. The key to a solution was found in the comprehensive idea of evangelization. Everything a Spiritan does must be brought under this head in its many-faceted variety. "Oppressed" was preferred to "abandoned", "helpless", "needy", as both suggesting the biblical horizon of expectation of the oppressed for God's reign, and calling not just for individual and collective charity but to action for transformation of oppressive structures. A new emphasis is therefore that of prophetic action for justice and peace. Spiritan apostolate is not seen as essentially "abroad" nor is this denied. It was recognized that transcultural situations may exist in the same country or even diocese. The latest theological foundations of mission were taken into account. The commission used the word "missionary" sparingly, rather depicting the realities beyond the word.

Culture was an all-pervading and irksome issue, yet clearly the greatest achievement of the commission. All master-ideas and blueprints were rejected in favour of a dynamic text, able to take body in different cultures, and reflect the different experiences of Spiritans. Recent experiences of the Congregation in South America, Africa and Islamic areas found expression. Community, for example, was presented in a very fluid manner in order to be open both to the tighter franco-phone experience, the anglophone tradition of healthy individualism, and African and South American dynamic communities which defy all Cartesian definition.

The charismatic nature of religious life received emphasis in the text. The Church must not quench the Spirit (I Th 5.19). She accepts religious life as a gift of the Spirit, who made religious spring up when, where and how he would. Each religious receives his/her call as a gift of the Spirit. *Appel, appelé*, is one of the dominant terms in the text; also *don*. Religious community is a communion, in the Spirit, of people led by the Spirit of God (Rom 8.14). Individual and community discernment becomes a mode of life. Responsibility is shared at every level. Councils bind superiors, bursars are accountable to superiors and to the community, community meetings are an obligation. Should we have "obedience" or "consensus"? The text leaves the two in dynamic tension.

A word about translation. It was found that *consécration* is "divine action" in English; in French it commonly refers to profession. The favourite phrase, *vie apostolique*, when rendered into German or English was found to be either meaningless or archaic. The French called book one *Règles* and book two *Constitutions*. *Règle* in this usage is more fundamental. In English, constitutions are more fundamental than rules. It was also found that the French tended towards beauty of language while the English generally went for the meaning. And how is one to make a culturally neutral English translation for all anglophones in the Congregation?

Beyond these we lived hidden and usually unmentioned experiences of the Spiritan charism. It is very Spiritan to dissimulate scholarship or excellence of any type. Spiritans are generally very interested in the practical and human dimension, and bored by the academic for academic's sake. Spiritans have a charity at once unassuming and homely, yet able to pull another's leg gently when one begins to put on airs. Spiritans do not dismiss anyone as of no account. The readiness to listen to, and make sense of, what another is saying, be he/she important or not, is amazing, even when it is obvious the other is talking nonsense! The ability for kenotic service seems to be a mark of Spiritans. There are many more dimensions of their "charism" that Spiritans have never put in writing.

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